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Conformity in Everyday Decision Making

Introduction

Conformity is defined as a fundamental aspect of human behavior and social interaction (in a group setting). It involves the tendency of individuals to modify their attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors to align with those of a group. This adjustment can arise from direct social pressure, stressors, or the desire to fit in or to blend in with a group, even when one's private beliefs differ from others (like religious beliefs and political beliefs etc.) As a social mechanism, conformity helps maintain alignment, order and predictability within groups, but it can also lead to a loss of individuality (uniqueness of person) and uncritical acceptance of group norms (blind belief in group rules). Psychologists have extensively studied conformity, with notable contributions from scholars like Solomon Asch and Herbert Kelman, who provided theoretical frameworks to explore the motives and mechanisms behind this behavior.

In this essay, I will analyze a personal experience that illustrates (create an image in your mind for developing interest in an essay) the impact of conformity in my life. These frameworks help us understand conformity in real-life situations. They show that conformity is complex and is understandable by simple means, it's not just a simple behavior but many factors influence why people go along with others.

Scenario: Taking part in the “Don’t Rush” Challenge During Lockdown

In April 2020, quarantine restricted face-to-face meetings due to COVID-19 from which lots and lots of people lost their loved ones, which brought chaos to developing countries and disrupted the regular routine of everyone from a child to clerk. Then during that time I explored new online social spaces (such as zoom, Google meets and classroom) which also helped me be a little productive during quarantine. Schools moved to online classes (after a long break due to parents' concern for our students' loss), and fear and confusion filled the air and exams dates were upon our head and there were difficulties maintaining decorum through screen. During this time, social media became a key way to stay connected and find entertainment.

One time the trend that spread fast was the “Don’t Rush” Challenge on TikTok (in quarantine this Chinese app became more famous than other apps like Facebook) and Instagram. People recorded themselves passing an item like a makeup brush or similar item while changing from casual home clothes to stylish outfits. These clips were edited into one video showing a group transformation. It was fun, creative, and a way to connect during a lonely time.

At first, I doubted it. I didn’t like being on camera and thought the trend was shallow. Still, some friends from school and college participated and encouraged me to try and still I was not convinced. Then their videos got lots of likes, comments, and messages on video and from other friends groups on WhatsApp. The chat kept buzzing with excitement, and it seemed like joining was almost expected and “what's app” also developed more intriguing features.

Then Finally, I decided to do it not the same trend but a different one with them (my school and college friends) to not look obvious. It took multiple tries to synchronise the move, and to edit the clip to match the others who followed the trend, and shared it. To my surprise, it got many positive comments and messages. I felt included and appreciated. What seemed minor revealed a pattern of social pressure. I was driven by the desire to fit in and avoid standing out.

Reflecting on why I joined, I realize I was mainly influenced by what others thought. I didn’t fully enjoy the activity or agree with it at first. I just wanted to be accepted and not be left out. No one forced me—subtle cues and hints made me feel like I had to participate. Everyone was tagging each other, commenting positively, and making the trend seem appealing. Not taking part felt like rejecting the group.

At the same time, informational influence played a role. During the early pandemic, many of us felt unsure and anxious. Seeing others take part and get praise made me question my first opinion. I thought maybe I’d overlooked something important. Watching others join in made me wonder if I was missing out on something worthwhile. I looked to their actions to guide my own choice in that unfamiliar situation.

Using Kelman’s model, I see my behavior started as compliance. I went along to keep the group happy, even if I didn’t agree deep down. Over time, repeated participation and positive feedback made me start to see myself as part of that group. I slowly started to believe that some parts of the trend were actually fun or creative, even if I didn’t fully understand the reasons behind it.

The Immediate Results of My Experience

Right after joining the trend, the outcome looked positive. I felt closer to my friends and more like I belonged. In a tough emotional time, it gave a moment of

normalcy and unity. It reminded us that, even stuck at home, we still had a social connection.

But there were subtler, longer-lasting effects. Being part of this trend made me realize how easily I could follow group norms, especially when others' approval mattered. I started paying more attention to how I showed myself on social media. I spent more time making my appearance and posts look good. Over time, I began to accept certain beauty and social standards that I hadn't cared about before.

This experience also made me wonder how often I had gone along with things without noticing. It showed how thin the line can be between having real interest and just acting to meet others' expectations. While following the crowd can sometimes help keep connections strong, it can also cause us to lose sight of who we really are or stop thinking for ourselves.

Seeing Conformity in Others

Reflecting on my own actions made me more aware of how conformity influences people around me. I started noticing similar patterns in friends and classmates. For example, a close friend joined a strict fitness program after some friends praised it. At first, she said it was just for health reasons. But soon, she started adopting rigid ideas about food, her body, and workouts. Even when she had doubts, she kept going, often defending its tough routines.

Her influence mostly came from what she believed was knowledge from the group. She thought they knew better about health and wellness. Her behavior showed how she had really internalized these ideas—her conformity went beyond actions and changed her beliefs. But it came at a cost. She felt stressed and often spoke about feeling not good enough when she couldn't meet the group's high standards.

These stories made me see that conformity is not always a conscious choice. It can sneak in slowly and weaken personal judgment, especially when we see group norms as superior. Spotting these signs has helped me make better choices about when to follow and when to stand on my own.

Looking at Conformity in a Digital World

In the modern age, conformity manifests in new and sometimes subtle ways—particularly in the digital world. Social media platforms have transformed how individuals perceive and respond to group behavior. With the rapid rise of trends, hashtags, viral challenges, and influencer content, conformity online has become more contagious than ever. A single viral video or trending post can set off a

chain reaction, quickly pulling thousands—if not millions—of users into copying behavior, language, or ideas. The mechanisms that encourage this behavior are built into the platforms themselves. Likes, comments, shares, and views serve as social rewards and punishments, subtly guiding user behavior and shaping what is deemed "acceptable" or "popular."

Often, the desire to fit in or maintain an online presence leads people to adopt these trends without much self-reflection. It can feel easier—and safer—to go along with the crowd rather than stand out or question the status quo. However, while conformity may offer short-term comfort or approval, it can also silence individuality and discourage critical thinking.

At the same time, the digital space offers a unique opportunity for resistance against conformity. Although algorithms tend to prioritize popular and familiar content, users still have the ability to curate their own experiences. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, threads and X (formerly Twitter) allow people to express diverse opinions, showcase their creativity, and connect with like-minded communities. Staying authentic online requires effort and awareness. It means pausing before blindly following a trend and asking yourself whether your actions reflect your true beliefs or just a need to be accepted.

From personal experience, joining a trend without much thought and then later reflecting on it helped me realize how easy it is to be swept up in digital conformity. That moment taught me the importance of evaluating my motives. Am I engaging with this because I genuinely support it, or because I fear being left out? Do I agree with a message because it aligns with my values, or am I just assuming the majority is right?

Digital conformity may be less overt than face-to-face pressure, but it’s just as powerful. Recognizing its presence is the first step in managing its influence. By critically analyzing what we consume, share, and support online, we can avoid becoming passive participants in digital trends. Instead of allowing algorithms and social approval to define our choices, we can take charge of our online behavior, choosing authenticity over approval and thoughtfulness over automatic acceptance.

Conclusion

This essay reflects on the idea of conformity, combining personal experience with well-known psychological theories. Here's an overview of its main points.

The core idea is that conformity is a strong, widespread influence on behavior. It is driven by the desire to fit in (normative influence) and the belief that others might know better (informational influence). Conformity isn’t just good or bad; its effects depend on how consciously we engage with it.

The essay shares a real example from the COVID-19 lockdown. During the "Don't Rush" Challenge, conformity played out visibly, showing how social pressure works by both wanting to belong and trusting others' judgment.

Psychological theories support this view. The author refers to experiments by Asch and ideas from Kelman to explain why people conform. Asch's studies showed how people tend to agree with a group's wrong answer just to avoid standing out. Kelman's theory breaks conformity into three types:

Compliance: Acting like others outside but disagreeing secretly, often to gain rewards or avoid punishment.
Identification: Conforming to look like someone admired or to belong to an in-group.
Internalization: Truly believing and accepting the group's view as right, both publicly and privately.

The outcomes of conformity can be both good and bad. On one hand, it helps build connections, reinforces shared values, and guides actions in uncertain times. On the other hand, it can cause self-doubt, hide personal truth, and lead to uncritical acceptance of norms.

The main message is that we need to be thoughtful about how we respond to social influence. We should recognize our motivations, ask tough questions, and decide when to follow and when to stand apart.

The essay stresses the importance of telling the difference between healthy unity and harmful conformity. Constructive unity benefits everyone and allows for progress. It exists when society works together while respecting individual beliefs. On the other hand, blind conformity suppresses new ideas, maintains injustices, and strips away personal truth.

The real challenge is to develop the skill to see when social pressure is helpful and when it is harmful. We should aim to make choices based on understanding rather than just fitting in. This balance lets us care for others while staying true to ourselves.

Overall, the essay presents a clear view of conformity. It combines personal point of view that helps build appeal to the reader to understand it properly with clarity and also with proven psychological ideas and urges us to be more aware and deliberate when faced with group influence.